

CIA director brands China “as big a threat to the US” as Russia

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In an extended interview with the BBC this week, CIA director Mike Pompeo spoke of the danger to the United States posed by Russia and China, as well as North Korea and Iran. While the American media concentrated on his comment that Russia would try to disrupt the US mid-term elections, Pompeo insisted that China posed “as big a threat to the US” as Russia.

The CIA director’s remarks should not be construed simply as an attempt to deflect attention from the crisis embroiling the Trump administration over allegations of colluding with Russia during the 2016 presidential election.

His warning about China is part of a developing campaign in the US to highlight sensational, but unsubstantiated, claims of Chinese interference and spying as the Trump administration ramps up trade war measures and the US military build-up against Beijing.

“Think about the scale of the two economies,” Pompeo told the BBC, referring to Chinese and Russian interference in the US. “The Chinese have a much bigger footprint upon which to execute that mission than the Russians do.”

The CIA chief raised the spectre of a concerted Chinese conspiracy, not just in the US but internationally, and said countries must do more collectively to combat Chinese efforts to exert power over the West.

“We can watch very focussed efforts to steal American information, to infiltrate the United States with spies—with people who are going to work on behalf of the Chinese government against America,” he said. “We see it in our schools. We see it in our hospitals and medical systems. We see it throughout corporate America. It’s also true in other parts of the world... including Europe and the UK.”

The CIA director said China had a greater ability than

Russia to exert influence. The hypocrisy involved is stunning. The CIA, which Pompeo extravagantly praised, is notorious, not only for spying, stealing secrets and meddling in politics around the world, but torture, assassination and toppling foreign governments.

Pompeo flagged the CIA’s focus on China as far back as July when he told the right-wing *Washington Free Beacon* that Beijing, not Moscow, posed the bigger long-term threat to the United States because of its robust economy and growing military power.

The CIA has been building up its resources to counter China on all fronts. “All the sort of old-school guys who used to do Kremlin work are now off working on this other politburo [in China],” Pompeo told a Washington forum in October, as reported by Voice of America.

However, the targeting of so-called Chinese interference in the United States is not restricted to the CIA. It involves the Trump administration, congressional committees, various think tanks and human rights organisations, and the media.

In mid-November, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), a congressional advisory body, recommended in its annual report that the draconian Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) be strengthened to require all staff of Chinese state-run media in the US to register as “foreign agents.”

FARA, passed in 1938 in the lead-up to World War II, was a war-time measure that paved the way for the surveillance and round-up of “enemy nationals.”

The US Justice Department recently required the Russian-based broadcaster, RT America, to register under FARA. Now, the USCC wants to toughen the legislation in order to hit Chinese media organisations, alleging their involvement in “intelligence gathering

and information warfare efforts.”

In mid-December, the influential Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), chaired by Senator Marco Rubio, held a hearing, entitled “The long arm of China: Exporting authoritarianism with Chinese characteristics,” to lay the basis for a political vendetta against organisations and individuals allegedly acting as agents of Chinese influence.

Significantly, Rubio and co-chair Chris Smith cited Australia, New Zealand and Canada as countries that have, in Smith’s words, “been rocked by scandals involving Chinese sponsored influence operations targeting politicians, businesses, and academic institutions.”

“Australia in particular is in the midst of a national crisis and all like-minded democratic allies should be supporting their efforts to root out those elements intended to corrupt or co-opt Australian political and academic institutions,” Smith said.

In fact, the Australian media and political establishment have been engaged in an 18-month witch-hunt based on lurid allegations of far-reaching Chinese intervention and influence in political, cultural and academic life. The Australian government, which has lined up completely with the US war drive against China, has introduced unprecedented and sweeping legislation into parliament that incorporates, but goes far beyond FARA, by outlawing all forms of loosely defined “foreign interference”.

Rubio and Smith exploited the unsubstantiated allegations in Australia to bolster trumped-up charges of extensive Chinese influence operations in the US and lay the basis for “rooting out” elements accused of corrupting American political life. “As we start to grapple with the scale and scope of Chinese influence operations, we will be looking for new legislative ideas... We must find ways to effectively and resolutely push back,” Smith declared.

In releasing the National Security Strategy in December, Trump signalled that China and Russia, not “terrorism,” were the greatest threats to the United States, making clear that the vast US intelligence and military apparatus would be re-oriented to the preparations for war involving major nuclear powers.

The 55-page document warned that “American competitors weaponise information to attack the values and institutions that underpin free societies, while

shielding themselves from outside information.” The underlying implication is that the US must crack down on basic democratic rights, as is already underway in the measures by American corporations such as Google and Facebook to “shield” Internet users.

In a January 9 article entitled “China’s fingerprints are everywhere,” *Washington Post* revealed that Trump had set in motion a National Security Council interagency probe into Chinese influence. A senior administration official told the newspaper it would examine Chinese activities “outside traditional espionage, the gray area of covert influence operations.”

The unnamed official said Australia had been the catalyst for the Trump administration’s investigation into “coercive and covert activities designed to influence elections, officials, policies, company decisions and public opinion.”

The examples that the official gave indicate the extraordinary extent of the probe: more than 350,000 Chinese students under pressure to toe Beijing’s line; American think tanks that accept Chinese funds; Hollywood studios concerned about ticket sales in China; and US news organisations facing pressure over visas for correspondents in China. The list of those being probed, of course, is far lengthier.

The article concluded by declaring that “America has never faced a rival quite like China,” then added: “America certainly doesn’t want a new ‘Red Scare,’ but maybe a wake-up call.” In reality, a vicious new McCarthyite witchhunt is exactly what is being prepared, with the assistance of the media, to pave the way for further deep inroads into democratic rights as the US war drive against China accelerates.



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